Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Literary Medicine: An Interplay of Mind, Body and Experience in Contemporary Fictions

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Introduction

Human experiences have been stored within literature since ancient times while it explores relationships and life alongside social institutions. Human pain and identity characteristics together with resilience has been explored for a long time through literary works. Particularly, illness narratives are effective means of communicating the real-life experiences of those battling mental and physical illnesses. The academic world has extensively studied illness memoirs written by people but has not fully analysed fictional representations of disease. In contrast to first-hand patient experiences, fictional narratives can play with narrative form, psychological depth, and symbolic representation, enabling a more complex examination of sickness that goes beyond firsthand accounts. “The postmodern experience of illness begins when ill people recognize that more is involved in their experiences than the medical story can tell” (Frank, 6). While existing frameworks, such as Arthur W. Frank’s typologies of restitution, chaos, and quest narratives, provide insights into how individuals structure illness experiences, they do not fully account for the fragmentation, nonlinearity, and psychological complexity often found in fictional narratives of illness and disability. Using psychoanalytic theory, temporality studies, and trauma theory to broaden the scope of sickness narrative analysis, this study looks at the narratives of mental illness, chronic illness, and disability in contemporary literature in an effort to close this gap.

> The body is not mute, but it is inarticulate; it does not use speech, yet begets it. The speech that the body begets includes illness stories; the problem of hearing these stories is to hear the body speaking in them. People telling illness stories do not simply describe their sick bodies; their bodies give their stories their particular shape and direction. People certainly talk about their bodies in illness stories; what is harder to hear in the story is the body creating the person. (Frank, 27)

Beyond its narrative function it acts as a lens to observe humans' emotional and ethical as well as cultural attributes. Literature serves as a fundamental component of interdisciplinary studies because it develops reflection abilities and empathy which become especially important for medicine and health situations.

The study of illness narratives establishes key connections between individual life experiences with social views of personal identity and health status while this research field has always been productive for scholars. Modern fiction literature is analysed in this research

because it displays the emotional framework together with temporal dimensions of mental illness, chronic illness, and disability. It explores how literary narratives subvert social stigmas, arouse empathy, and reinterpret identity in the setting of sickness by drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from narrative medicine, affect theory, intersectionality, and temporalities of illness. Accordance between narrative practices and medical knowledge development as well as patient healthcare stands established as an important field in medical humanities. The transformation in medical patient care led to narrative medicine, providing healthcare providers training for empathetic story-based interactions with patients. “These embodied stories have two sides, one personal and the other social” (Frank, 2). The fundamental concepts of narrative medicine find useful application in fiction because storytelling remains the key factor for establishing illness perceptions and disability and mental health understanding. Literary works create an extensive interpretation space which breaks conventional disease stories along with new analytical methods regarding mental and physical experience interactions.

Health humanities extend medical humanities through interconnection between literature and philosophy along with ethics and cultural studies which helps explain our knowledge about health and illness. Modern fiction uses metaphors along with unreliable voice and time disruptions to model the unpredictable aspects of mental and continuous diseases just like this theory does. Literature analysis concerning illness becomes possible through the multidimensional framework consisting of psychoanalysis, temporality, and trauma theory.

> We early recognized attention, representation, and affiliation as the three movements of narrative medicine that emerged from our commitment to skilled listening, the power of representation to perceive the other, and the value of the partnerships that result from narrative contact. (Charon et al., 2017)

Narrative medicine gains its importance from its power to create human connections through storytelling since these methods develop empathy for understanding between patients and medical providers in clinical and social environments. Reading experiences involving narratives can be affected by how emotional content spreads among readers according to affect theory standards. Temporalities of illness create an additional aspect which reveals how linear time periods get disrupted by the recurring or discontinuous conditions that commonly affect patients. The collected frameworks show how literary works reveal authentic situations of

people who face illness and their healthcare experiences thus exposing cultural narratives surrounding health disabilities.

This research also engages with the role of intersectionality, addressing how factors such as gender, class, and race intersect with health experiences. The study directs its attention to modern fiction because it recognizes the essential importance of these narratives for contemporary issues such as social prejudices and caring responsibilities along with feeling disconnected from the world. The research analyses novels closely for understanding how literary representation transforms our views about illness together with self-conceptualization and choice-making abilities.

Introduction to the Author and the Works

The analytic works in this study explore diverse subjective accounts of mental illness and chronic illness as well as disability. The writings present various perspectives which fulfil the main purpose of this research through their various representations of health issues. Intentionally the selected texts avoid linear structure across various genres while using different narrative methods and cultural backgrounds because illness and disability affect people uniquely and deeply. These texts create a varied collection for examining both the time-based aspects and emotional responses to health issues through their depiction of disabilities and mental illnesses.

Mental Illness

Gail Honeyman established her career as a British novelist following the release of her critically acclaimed debut novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017). Through its protagonist Eleanor the book illustrates the psychological obstacles she faces because of social isolation and past trauma. Through her sympathetic storytelling and humorous yet vulnerable approach to mental health and recovery, Honeyman makes this text integral to the study of mental illness and recovery.

Patric Gagné is a contemporary American author who delves into the psychological elements of human psychology. In *Sociopath* (2024), Gagné digs into antisocial personality disorder, presenting a problematic leading protagonist who challenges conventional notions of morality and mental health. This memoir is relevant because it studies how society creates

mental disorders and displays its negative attitude towards mental health discrimination and its critique of stigmatization.

Chronic Illness

Throughout *Handle with Care* (2009) Jodi Picoult the American author explores ethical questions while examining family issues. The story follows a child with brittle bone disease while exploring both moral aspects of parental care and legal conflicts. Picoult uses complex storytelling with insights about emotional strength to create an essential text that addresses chronic illness complexities.

Mark Haddon, a British writer and illustrator, established his reputation through *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003). In this novel Christopher Boone, an autistic boy tells the story that reveals his unique disability perspective. Through his unconventional storytelling methods Haddon analyses how disability and autonomy create vital understanding about characterizing persistent health conditions in literary works.

Disability

In *Me Before You* (2012) Jojo Moyes explores loves relationship with autonomy and dignities through his British international bestseller. Will Traynor who is a quadriplegic person meets his caretaker Louisa Clark as they both face the complicated emotional and ethical questions about disability. Through his understanding storytelling Moyes reveals how disability affects daily life and the prejudice disability brings to society.

In *The Silence Between Us* (2019) Alison Gervais employs her strength as a young adult American author and activist to create a compelling story. The story by Gervais explores disability stereotypes as she demonstrates self-advocacy alongside resilient behaviour among people with disabilities. The novel's focus on accessibility and identity makes it a crucial text for exploring disability in a contemporary context.

Literature Review

Rita Charon's "Narrative Medicine: Attention, Representation, Affiliation" (2005), tensions the importance of storytelling in medicine, aligning both patients and doctors as narrators. Though she realises how narrative has played a historical part in healthcare, she takes issue

with its reduced presence in contemporary clinical practise. The paper proposes the addition of narrative competencies to medical training in order to increase empathy and improve patient care. It claims a gap in research into the efficacy of narrative medicine in disparate healthcare scenes but proceeds to discuss the advantages of narrative medicine and how it can change patients' sufferings.

“Narrative Medicine: A Model for Empathy, Reflection, Profession, and Trust” (2001), by Rita Charon discovers how narrative capability improves patient-physician relationships by nurturing empathy and emotional understanding. A case is made in the paper for how reflective writing and close reading can be used to both improve medical education and in turn patient outcomes. Nevertheless, it states the limitations of the research that occurs on integrating the storey medicine to the present curricula and the obstacles to its implementation in diverse medical settings.

Trisha and Greenhalgh’s “Narrative-Based Medicine: Narrative-Based Medicine in an Evidence-Based World” (1999), analyses the limitations of evidence-based medicine, at variance that it overlooks individual patient narratives. The paper warns of how statistics can take the risk of losing the critical insights through reduction to the simple. In this paper Greenhalgh calls for a combined empirical evidence and personal narratives balanced approach that may complement traditional clinical methodologies and fill a gap in the way narrative medicine can work.

Johanna Shapiro’s “Illness Narratives: Reliability, Authenticity, and the Empathic Witness” (2011), scrutinizes patient narratives in medical settings, highlighting how personal motivations and societal influences shape storytelling. The paper problems conventional recovery narratives that might not always correspond to the patients’ own lived experiences, in particular patients with chronic illnesses. In addition, it has raised ethical issues about the third parties' ability to represent patients' storeys well wherein there is a possibility of misrepresentation.

Stephen Ahern’s “Affect Theory and Literary Criticism” (2024), explores the role of affect in literary interpretation, emphasizing how emotions shape narrative structures. Based on Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi, Ahern builds her case that affect bridges cognitive and bodily experience, making affect an important part of character motivation. He demonstrates a

lack in applying affect theory to 21st century fiction inflected by illness, in particular how characters rhetorically work their way with their conditions.

Truran's "Affect Theory: Exploring Dynamic Interdisciplinary Perspectives" (2022), examines the evolution of affect theory across disciplines, emphasizing its potential for reshaping social and cultural narratives. The paper explores affect's philosophical roots but argues that its theory has not been employed in healthcare settings. While Truran implies that affect affects patient and provider dialogues, the work does not specifically discuss how this is the case for narrative medicine, and thus presents a research opportunity.

Elizabeth DuPerier's "The Role of Narrative Medicine in Patient Healing and Meaningful Clinical Practice" (2023), discusses how narrative medicine enhances clinician-patient relationships, mitigating burnout and loss of professional identity. The paper claims that humanities-based approaches are highly likely to promote resilience in medical professionals, but there is no empirical data to support the argument, and argues that systematic studies on how effective humanities can be in clinical settings are needed.

R. S. Downie's "Literature and Medicine" (1991), explores how literature enhances medical understanding by fostering a holistic, "whole-person" approach to patient care. Anton Chekhov, among other physicians, He explains how many physicians have employed their knowledge of medicine to enrich literary narratives. The paper proposes that literature can be incorporated into medical education to increase doctors' empathy, improve the doctors' self-conception.

G. S. Rousseau's "Literature and Medicine: The State of the Field" (1981), examines how medical themes have shaped literary narratives throughout history. For neglecting the influence of medical thought on literature, he criticises literary scholars, who thus cannot develop a proper understanding of character development. This paper argues that interdisciplinary collaboration between literary and medical scholars should be pursued in order to explore the contribution of medical narratives represented in cultural discourse.

Maura Spiegel and Rita Charon's "Editing and Interdisciplinarity: Literature, Medicine, and Narrative Medicine" (2009), discusses the integration of literary studies into medical practice. The authors admit that literary techniques, like close reading and reflective writing, met initial resistance from both, but elucidate that they can improve patient care. The paper

shows the real-world examples of how literature aids medical professionals in processing grief while helping them with deeper understanding of illness.

Sebastian von Peter's "The Temporality of 'Chronic' Mental Illness" (2010), critiques the traditional, static perception of time in psychiatry, arguing that rigid temporal frameworks can hinder patient development. He argues in favour of fluid, individualised understanding of time, arguing that change in mental illness is not linear and cannot be assimilated into therapeutic practises. This study is aligned with its study on temporal disruption of illness narrative.

Rita Charon's "Narrative Medicine: Form, Functions, and Ethics" (2001), explores how narrative writing benefits both patients and physicians. The paper argues that narrativization assists the patient in the articulation of their breakdown experiences, and in doing so contributes to the development of coping mechanisms and emotional resilience. And in turn, physicians acquire a better insight into the clinical relations and ethical responsibilities. However, the paper proposes the inclusion of narrative writing in medical training but that raises moral concerns such as obtaining patient consent for publication.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's "The Story of 'I': Illness and Narrative Identity" (2002), examines how illness disrupts personal identity, creating a "hole in identity" that forces individuals to reconcile their past, present, and future selves. The paper then uses such examples as Oliver Sacks and Barbara Webster to demonstrate the impact of bodily and neurological changes on narrative continuity. This is a particularly relevant study to the work being undertaken in this research, since it connects illness experiences with disruptions to temporal and narrative in fiction.

Diane Price Herndl's "Disease versus Disability: The Medical Humanities and Disability Studies" (2005), critiques the traditional medical model's failure to distinguish between disease and disability. Disability studies, she says, are aimed at dislodging the pathological condition to focus on the lived experience and disabling medicalized 'narratives'. The content of this paper is situated in relation to the study as regarding how contemporary fiction presents disability beyond medical diagnosis, focusing on how disability is perceived by society and how an individual defines themselves.

Michael Bérubé's "Disability and Narrative" (2005), explores how disability narratives shape cultural discourse and literary representation. Mainstream narratives often propagate ableist perspectives, portraying the characters as either a tragedy or an inspiration, and he critiques that. This consequently makes the paper relevant to the analysis of disability representation in fiction, as disability should be more nuanced and recognise individual agency, as well as challenge stereotypes.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's "Disability and Representation" (2005), examines how disability is constructed in literary and visual culture. Yet she says disabled bodies often serve as a symbol of a moral lesson or inspirational overcoming, not as a fully realised person. In this vein, the study's goal is to interrogate how contemporary fiction represents disability in ways that deconstruct societal conventions, and the paper puts forth the need for such representations that go beyond reductive tropes.

Research Gap

The field of literature and health humanities has extensive research but requires more investigation into temporal and emotional aspects of illness and disability as presented in modern fiction. Research of illness has primarily examined first-person illness narratives rather than theoretical approaches in fictional stories which study health conditions through imaginative methods. Foundational works by Arthur W. Frank in *The Wounded Storyteller* and Rita Charon's contributions to narrative medicine identify storytelling and narratives as a vital method to understand health and illness. Studies primarily examine real-life stories and medical practices instead of delivering thorough research relating fiction to cultural understanding of illness. Affect theory exists throughout the field of health humanities but its combination with illness temporalities across fictional literature has not received extensive scholarly study. Literature studies today lack extensive analysis of how gender interacts with race and class when expressing illness and disability. The research fills academic space by using a interdisciplinary approach to analyse modern literary works which exposes new perspectives about stigma elimination and empathy generation.

Objectives of the study

The research investigates disability, chronic illness, and mental illness are portrayed across contemporary literature, looking at how illness narratives develop through temporal ruptures

that produce both broken timelines and repetitive health experiences. This study considers intersectionality's effects on characters' lives through gender along with racism and class then it also investigates emotional disease aspects which focus on loneliness and caregiving and resiliency. This study evaluates the ways modern literature enhances health humanities by developing empathy through cultural prejudice elimination and by challenging sociological stereotypes about medical issues.

Research Methodology

The research methodology is qualitative research and it involves looking closely at six novels written in contemporary times where disability, chronic illness or mental illness is the theme. The study explores how these texts critique social stigma through emotional and temporal aspects of health on the basis of affect theory, narrative medicine, temporalities of illness and intersectionality. By analysing storytelling techniques like first person narration, fragmented timelines, and connecting the narratives of the caregiving son and the caregiving daughter, this study examines how people discover solutions to their own aloofness from good health, as well as collapsed times. Intersectionality brings gender, ethnicity and class together towards health narrative, while comparative analysis seeks what is same and different among texts. Through this study, it demonstrates how fiction sparks empathy, sparks counter-bias, rewrites identity, and how literary studies and health humanities advance in the support of primary sources and theoretical writings by academics such as Rita Charon and Arthur W. Frank.

Scope and Limitations of the study

In terms of the scope, it stretches beyond the impact these narratives have on the challenge of societal stigmas, the evocation of empathy and the critique of cultural and institutional attitudes toward health. By reading from diverse texts, the research illustrates multiple takes on and experience with identity, resilience, and inclusivity in such contexts, through which literature’s role in that can be seen. Beyond this, the study also discusses the theoretical debates about the reading of storytelling, time and intersectionality with the fiction functioning as a powerful tool to develop the culture and social transformation.

However, the study lacks usefulness due to its dependence on a specifically six novels that might not fully characterise representations of illness and disability in contemporary fiction. Besides, the analysis relies on qualitative methods rather than empirical data and reader

response studies that could have yielded other views how these narratives were received and how they had effects. Lastly, while the study takes into account multiple theories, the depth of the usage of each theory is limited within the scope of the thesis and though there are numerous theories that can be applied, however some aspects will be focused specifically rather than others. Therefore, the study does make an important contribution to literary studies and health humanities by establishing a ready resource for further thought on the overlap of literature, illness, and identity.

Plan of the study

The structure of this research proposal is structured to explore systematically how contemporary fiction represents mental illness, chronic illness and disability. The study is divided into five chapters and each chapter is dedicated to one of the thematic focuses and close textual analysis is employed of six novels divided into five chapters. The chapters are predicated on continuous interdisciplinary strokes so that it reads like narrative medicine, affect theory, intersectionality, and temporalities of illness.

Tentative Chapter Plan

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces and explains the interdisciplinary scope of the research by explaining how narrative medicine, affect theory and the temporalities of illness, are important to the study of contemporary fiction. It considers the way between literature and health humanities is developing, and it offers a critical review of the literature on illness and disability narratives. The last part of chapter presents the questions and objectives of the research.

Chapter 2: Representing Mental Illness in Fiction

This chapter also considers the representation of mental illness in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017) by Gail Honeyman and *Sociopath* (2019) by Patric Gagné. It examines how these novels describe the psychical and emotive environment of mental sickness, covering subjects of trauma, isolation, and cure. Further, the analysis also identifies narrative techniques like first person narration and unreliable points of view to completely envelop the character's 'inner worlds'; in other words, the reader is completely immersed in the character's inner worlds.

Chapter 3: Chronic Illness and the Disruption of Time

This chapter analyses *Handle with Care* (2009) by Jodi Picoult and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon. It focuses on the fact the individual's experience of periods of relapse and their reconstitution of personal and familial identities are periods of relative temporal stability at the edge of chaos. Further, the chapter draws on the insights from temporalities of illness and affect theory to clarify the emotional dimensions of caregiving as well as the broader expectations of the people with chronic illness in society.

Chapter 4: Disability and the Question of Agency

This chapter investigates the portrayal of disability in *Me Before You* (2012) by Jojo Moyes and *The Silence Between Us* (2019) by Alison Gervais. It critiqued society's notions of disability that include those of autonomy, dignity and self-advocacy. These narratives are analysed as to how they undermine stereotypes and look at disability as both a private and social experience. The journey of the heroes is brought into focus through the lens of intersectionality as it relates to things like gender, class, and accessibility.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Finally, the final chapter synthesises the conclusion drawn from the central chapters, commenting on what the chosen texts add to the debate about illness and disability. It reiterates the value of narrative medicine, affect theory, and temporality of illness as lenses through which the cultural and the emotional side of health conditions is seen. The broader implications of the research for literary studies, health humanities, and health narrative in societies is finally discussed.

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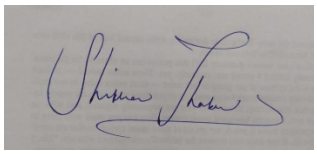

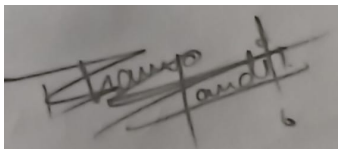

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